

COMPLETE SHORT STORY BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Mr. Greenlaw's Forty Thousand Pounds

MR. LAXWORTHY took quite a fancy to the grill room at the Miltan. Here for three days he lunched and dined, watching with keen interest the constant coming and going of one of the most cosmopolitan crowds in Europe.

From his table against the wall and with his strange gift of reading the spoken words from the lips of those whom he watched he skirted the edge of more than one romance, peered over the brink into several strange little tragedies and learned something of the methods of a very well known financier.

On the fourth morning, toward the completion of his luncheon, an incident occurred which brought him for the first time into actual touch with one of the figures in this peepshow.

A lady entered the restaurant and descending the main passage began slowly to thread her way through the maze of tables toward the side of the room where Mr. Laxworthy sat. She came so slowly and her appearance was so unusual that nearly everybody turned to gaze at her as she passed.

She was tall, slim and exceedingly dark. Her complexion was absolutely colorless, but seemed to be more the natural pallor of the French woman than an evidence of ill health. She was plainly dressed, but in the height of fashion. There was not a woman there who did not know that her hat and her costume came from the neighborhood of the Rue de la Paix.

The maitre d'hotel came hurrying to her side.

"Madame desires a table?" he murmured. "Unfortunately on this side we are full. I will arrange something if madame will be so good as to follow me."

The lady was looking at Mr. Laxworthy's table, by the side of which she was now standing.

"I prefer to sit here," she said decidedly. "It amuses me to watch the people, and as you see, I am alone."

The lady looked at Mr. Laxworthy's disappearing omelet and up at Mr. Laxworthy. He promptly interposed.

"If the lady would like my table," he said, "it will be at liberty within five minutes."

"You are very kind," the lady answered softly. "I will certainly wait."

Now, in an ordinary case the chief maitre d'hotel would have escorted the lady to the small reception room adjoining the restaurant, would have kept his eye upon Mr. Laxworthy's table, would have had it speedily rearranged on the departure of Mr. Laxworthy and would have himself fetched madame at the earliest opportunity. It happened, however, that at that precise moment quite his most important client touched him on the elbow. With a word of excuse he hurried away. The lady stood for a moment irresolute. Mr. Laxworthy rose to his feet.

"If you will honor me by accepting the vacant seat at my table until the arrival of my coffee," he said, "it will give me great pleasure."

She thanked him with a very soft and brilliant smile. She deposited her velvet bag and the trifles which she was carrying upon the table, and seating herself took up the menu.

"You do not mind," she asked him, "if I order my luncheon? I am hungry."

Mr. Laxworthy's coffee was hot and they talked banalities. The question of nationalities arose. Mr. Laxworthy was invited to guess the birthplace of his companion. With commendable civility he suggested Paris. The lady smiled.

"I am South American," she told him. "I am over here on business. I have immense estates there which I wish to sell."

Mr. Laxworthy's eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

"A very interesting country," he murmured. "A paradise," she replied.

"I lived there for some seven years," Mr. Laxworthy remarked.

In that case, the lady exclaimed, with a little shrug of her shoulder, "I must rearrange the locality of my estates!"

"Ah!" Mr. Laxworthy said softly. "South America is rather a dangerous country. People travel so much nowadays."

She smiled.

"Of course you know who I am really. I come here from the Royal Opera House at St. Petersburg and I am going to dance in the ballet at Covent Garden."

Mr. Laxworthy nodded approvingly.

"If you will permit me to say so without impertinence," he declared, "your statement is easily to be believed. You look the part. I scarcely see, however, its practical advantages—at any rate as compared with your position as a South American lady with immense estates to sell in a city of susceptible men."

Madame laughed at her companion.

"You live, I perceive, as a recluse," she remarked. "To dance at Covent Garden one requires jewels, beautiful dresses, an electric brougham, a motor car in which to seek the fresh air. Alas! I have discovered your city, but not your susceptible men."

"Your imagination," Mr. Laxworthy decided, "is excellent, but you lack precision of detail. I never in my life saw a dancer with an ankle and instep like yours."

She sighed.

"They told me," she said, "that you were a man of observation and peculiar gifts. You make me feel quite clumsy."

"Madame," he replied, "look around you. There are fifty small parties of men and women luncheon in this room. Let us say that half of them are doing so from the pleasure they find in one another's society."

"The other half is composed of men and women who are each seeking something from the other. On our right a gentleman is seeking to sell a patent to a financier. Over there a German merchant is trying to impress his London agent with the superiority of his goods over all others."

"We come to ourselves. We, too, are human beings in temporary juxtaposition. It is you who have sought me—not I you. It is not for the pleasure of my society; therefore it is something else you want."

"Oh, Mr. Laxworthy!" she sighed. "You are much too clever for a poor, inexperienced young woman. I fear that you are not even susceptible."

Mr. Laxworthy showed no surprise. "I was inclined to suspect," he admitted, "that that was the case. I trust that Mr. Greenlaw is well."

"He is in excellent health, I believe," the lady replied.

"Gurs has been a pleasant chat," he remarked, "but you have not yet told me the object of your coming. I am a man of over middle age and I am moderately wealthy. Of my principles I will not speak, but such as they are, although I claim for myself a considerable latitude of action, I am on the side of the law."

"In the enterprise which I am about to propose to you," the lady declared, "you will remain in that very desirable position."

"It is a matter of money—a great deal of money," she continued. "Less than a year ago Daniel Greenlaw entrusted a sum of forty thousand pounds to a Mr. Wills, who was a stock broker in the city. He entrusted it to him without conditions because a man in Mr. Greenlaw's position, as you can readily understand, is obliged to trust some one."

"Mr. Wills was a man of honor and there is no doubt that while he lived not only was the money perfectly safe but he would have gone out of his way to let Daniel Greenlaw have it, however difficult the circumstances may have been."

"Unfortunately, three or four months ago Mr. Wills died and his partners are very different people to deal with. They need the money in their business and they have no idea of parting with it if it can be helped."

"In reply to the indirect applications that have been made to them they have declined to communicate or to pay over any money to any one else except Daniel Greenlaw himself. The police know this and so do Messrs. Lewitt & Montague, who know that they know it. It is almost impossible for Daniel to go to law, but he wants the money."

"Quite an interesting situation," Mr. Laxworthy admitted. "Legally of course there are many ways of obtaining payment, but on the other hand I can see the difficulty. These men have only to object to the amount or the terms or something and take the matter into court. Greenlaw cannot appear. Any one holding an authorization from him would be cross-examined as to its source."

"I see that you grasp some of the difficulties," the lady remarked. "But the enterprise is simple enough. Daniel Greenlaw wants you to collect his money for him. I have here an authorization properly signed and witnessed."

She passed a paper across the table. Mr. Laxworthy studied it carefully and put it into his pocket.

"You will do me the honor, then," Mr. Laxworthy begged, "of luncheon with me here a week from to-day at the same time."

"I shall only regret, dear Mr. Laxworthy," she whispered, as they passed down the room, "that it takes seven whole days to make a week."

Forrest Anderson was received a few mornings later at the offices of Messrs. Wills, Lewitt & Montague with all the consideration due to a prospective client of satisfactory appearance.

Mr. Lewitt, who was a small man with thin, dark features, sat at a desk with a telephone on either side of him. He motioned his visitor to an easy chair and read from the card:

MR. FORREST ANDERSON,
Foxton Manor,
Leicesterhire.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Anderson. What can we have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Mr. Anderson glanced around the room as though to make sure that they were alone.

"I have called," he began confidentially, "on behalf of a client of yours—Daniel Greenlaw."

Mr. Lewitt started and snatched a speaking tube from his desk.

"Excuse me for one moment, sir," he begged. "I should like my partner to be present. Montague, he went on through the speaking tube, 'step this way at once if you please.'"

Mr. Montague, spruce, well groomed,

dark, oily, appeared almost immediately. "Close the door, Sam," Mr. Lewitt begged. "Here's this gentleman's card. He comes on behalf of Mr. Daniel Greenlaw."

Mr. Montague's lips became for a moment pursed.

"What is his business?" he asked quickly. "What doth he want?"

They both looked at their visitor anxiously. Mr. Anderson spoke in some affected embarrassment.

"I am sure," he said, "that Mr. Greenlaw's fears have no real foundation. However, as you know, Mr. Wills was his friend, and he has only the pleasure of a very slight acquaintance with either of you gentlemen. To put the matter to you plainly, Mr. Greenlaw has been disturbed by rumors as to the stability of your firm."

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Montague exclaimed.

"I have heard it said," Mr. Forrest Anderson continued suavely, "that the death of the senior partner will sometimes affect the credit of the most substantial firms. Mr. Greenlaw, let me hasten to assure you, only requires assurances of your firm's stability of your firm."

A marked air of relief was immediately apparent in the countenances of the two partners.

"Anything we can do," Mr. Lewitt hastened to say—"we can without the slightest difficulty prove to you the stability of our position. We should not even object to taking you to our bankers."

"Mr. Greenlaw's position," Mr. Anderson went on, "is a somewhat peculiar one. At the same time, gentlemen, I am sure you will be relieved to hear that several recent—shall I say affairs?—which have been attributed to Mr. Greenlaw have been attributed to him quite erroneously."

"Delighted to hear it," Mr. Lewitt declared perfunctorily. "Let me ask you, Mr. Anderson, is Mr. Greenlaw thinking of withdrawing his money?"

"Not that I am aware of," Mr. Anderson replied. "That, at any rate, is not the object of my visit."

The faces of the partners again expressed the liveliest satisfaction.

"There is interest and dividend," Mr. Montague remarked, "amounting to a considerable sum. Perhaps Mr. Greenlaw would like a check or note for that?"

Mr. Anderson shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Greenlaw," he explained, "is in no need of money. The object of my visit is simply this: Mr. Greenlaw wishes to assure himself of the safety of his capital. He is a peculiar man and he wishes to do so in a manner of his own."

"Very good, very good," Mr. Lewitt murmured softly.

"Mr. Greenlaw," Mr. Anderson continued, again glancing around the room, "requires ocular demonstration of the safety of his investment, and for that purpose is willing to run a not inconsiderable risk. He proposes to present himself here at half past 12 next Tuesday morning."

"What! In this office?" Mr. Montague exclaimed.

"Exactly. There is risk, of course, but, as you have doubtless heard, Mr. Greenlaw is the cleverest man at a disguise on the face of the earth. He will come as an elderly gentleman, and he requires to see upon your desk £40,000 worth of bank notes or Government bonds, payable to bearer, and made out in his name."

The two partners looked at one another.

"But surely, Mr. Anderson," Mr. Lewitt protested, "a visit to the bankers would have an equally satisfactory effect?"

Mr. Anderson shook his head.

"Greenlaw," he said, "is a man of cranky notions. He is also the most obstinate person I ever knew in my life. If I might venture to offer you any advice I would suggest that you humor him in this matter. Mr. Greenlaw would, of course, expect to pay the commission upon any necessary transference of stock."

Mr. Lewitt rose from his seat.

"If you will excuse me," he begged, "I should like to consult with my partner for a moment."

"By all means," Mr. Anderson agreed. The two members of the firm left the

room. When they returned in about five minutes their accustomed sleek amiability was once more visible in their countenances.

"We have decided," Mr. Montague declared, "to humor Mr. Greenlaw's whim."

Mr. Anderson shook hands with both the partners.

"I am sure," he said, "that you have decided wisely."

At precisely half past 12 on the following Tuesday morning Mr. Laxworthy and Mr. Forrest Anderson entered the offices of Messrs. Wills, Lewitt & Montague. They were shown without an instant's delay into Mr. Lewitt's room, where the two partners were waiting.

"This," Mr. Anderson announced, "is Mr. Greenlaw."

"Care to shake hands?" Mr. Laxworthy asked briskly.

"My dear Mr. Greenlaw, delighted!" Mr. Montague exclaimed with effusion, holding out his fat white fingers. "Only too delighted to have the pleasure of meeting at last the valued client!"

"We have often spoken of you," Mr. Lewitt added, also offering his hand, "and I think we may say that we have taken great interest in your investments. Mr. Greenlaw, Mr. Wills was always most particular what he put you in for. Have a cigar?"

Mr. Laxworthy accepted it.

"Where's my money?" he demanded. "In a moment—in a moment, my dear sir," Mr. Lewitt replied. "Now, if you will come over to this table."

We thought it best, in order to remove all possible ground for suspicion, to show you the money in Bank of England notes. How do you like the look of these, eh?"

He thumped down two packets of bank notes upon the table.

"Something told about that, eh?" Mr. Montague remarked. "We've arranged it in two piles, tho that you can count one and Mr. Anderson the other. Take your time about it. No hurry."

"Perhaps not for you?" Mr. Laxworthy retorted. "Can't say I'm too comfortable here myself."

"No need to detain you a moment longer than you care to stay," Mr. Lewitt assured him suavely. "Mr. Montague would only have liked the opportunity of taking you to our bankers. I can assure you, my dear sir, that we could put on the table of our own money, more than that useful little amount of yours which you are just counting."

"Glad to hear it," Mr. Laxworthy replied. "Can't think why people ever bother to try and make money honestly. You and I know something better than that, eh, Mr. Montague?"

Mr. Montague grinned a little feebly. "We do not condescend," he began. "Twenty thousand pounds in my pile," Mr. Laxworthy interrupted.

"Same here," Forrest Anderson echoed.

Mr. Laxworthy thrust both bundles of notes into his pocket.

Mr. Lewitt started.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "What's that?" "My money," Mr. Laxworthy announced. "I'm leaving the country. I'm going to take it with me."

Mr. Lewitt stared at him aghast. Mr. Montague hurried up to the scene of action.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "What's this, eh? Not the fat, if you please, with that money?"

"Why not?" Mr. Laxworthy asked. "It's mine."

Mr. Lewitt turned to Mr. Anderson with outstretched hands.

"This gentleman here," he cried, "told us particularly that you were going to leave the money here with us, that you only wanted to see it. We've shown it you, it's quite safe, you can have your interest and dividends in cash now if you like. But the £40,000 has got to stop with us."

"Sorry," Mr. Laxworthy said coolly. "Good morning!"

He turned toward the door. Mr. Lewitt leaned over his desk.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he whispered hoarsely, "be wise!"

Mr. Laxworthy turned and faced him. "What do you mean?"

"Mr. Greenlaw," he begged, "now be reasonable. We cannot afford to let the



money go like this. We must protect our own interests. Now come. If a few thousand pounds—"

"Thank you," Mr. Laxworthy interrupted. "I've no time for silly discussions. I've got my money and I'm off."

"You don't understand!" Mr. Montague exclaimed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "We must protect our own interests."

"And I mine!" Mr. Laxworthy answered, turning swiftly around it with his right hand in the pocket of his overcoat.

There was very little cover in the room, but what there was Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt promptly took advantage of. Mr. Lewitt slid from his chair to the ground behind the roll-top desk at which he had been seated. Mr. Montague squeezed himself tightly against the wall and held out a heavy office chair in front of his face.

"What's the game?" Mr. Laxworthy demanded fiercely. "Have you laid a trap for me?"

The glittering little piece of steel which Mr. Laxworthy held so firmly in front of him seemed to exercise an almost paralyzing effect upon the two partners. He reiterated his question:

"Have you communicated with the police? You may as well answer me. I'll shoot you if you don't."

Mr. Lewitt's head appeared timidly from behind the desk.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he stammered, "we don't want any trouble here. You just leave that money with us, put it down on the corner of the table. You'll get your interest all right. You can't have safer investments."

Mr. Montague moved the chair cautiously from before his face.

"Your money is at stake with uth, Mr. Greenlaw," he protested, "at the Bank of England."

Mr. Laxworthy's arm swung round and up went the chair. "Answer my question," he insisted.

"Have you communicated with the police? Am I going to walk into a trap when I leave this room?"

Mr. Lewitt's head and shoulders appeared from behind the desk. He felt much more comfortable while Mr. Laxworthy's arm was pointed toward his partner.

"Mr. Greenlaw," he pleaded earnestly, "we have no ill will against you. We want to see you get away quite safely, but there is always a risk. Take my advice now, my dear sir, do! Leave that money here and you can go just whenever and wherever you please."

"And supposing I refuse?" Mr. Laxworthy asked.

Mr. Lewitt's head and shoulders disappeared out of sight. Mr. Montague held the chair squarely in front of his face. A voice came from behind the desk.

"For our own protection," it said, "we were compelled to ask a policeman to occupy the anteroom. We shall not communicate with him at all unless—unless we are obliged."

Mr. Laxworthy turned quickly to the door.

"Come along, Anderson," he directed. "These fellows think too much of their lives to play that sort of game."

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Laxworthy walked steadily down the stairs, regardless of the ringing of electric bells, the whistling and the tumult of voices. Before they were out of the building, however, they heard the sound of pursuing footsteps. A policeman and a detective in plain clothes were on their heels. Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt hung over the banisters.

"That's your man," Mr. Montague

called out. "He's got forty thousand pounds of our money. Be careful—he's got a pistol!"

Mr. Laxworthy and Forrest Anderson stood at the door of the motor car. Detective Marlin stepped out onto the pavement just as the inspectors had touched Mr. Laxworthy's shoulder.

"You had better explain to these people who I am," Mr. Laxworthy said to Marlin. "They are trying to arrest me. Seem to have got an idea into their heads that I am Daniel Greenlaw."

The inspector and his subordinate recognized Marlin and saluted.

"We are here upon private information, sir," the former asserted.

"No good," Detective Marlin answered, shaking his head. "This gentleman is John T. Laxworthy. He is personally known to me."

Emboldened by the presence of the guardians of the peace Mr. Montague and Mr. Lewitt stood on the outskirts of the little group. The inspector turned toward them.

"Some mistake here, sir," he said. "This gentleman's name is Mr. Laxworthy—friend of Inspector Marlin, one of our chiefs at Scotland Yard."

"He told us himself," Lewitt protested excitedly, "that he was Greenlaw!"

"He's got Greenlaw's money," Mr. Montague cried wildly. "He's got it in his pocket."

Mr. Laxworthy produced some documents, which he handed to Mr. Marlin. "Will some one take these available gentlemen away?" he begged. "You will find there complete authorization for me to collect the money which they have just paid me."

Mr. Marlin examined the documents. "So far as I can see," he told Mr. Lewitt, "these papers are absolutely in order. Mr. Laxworthy was fully empowered to receive this money on behalf of Mr. Greenlaw."

"But he said that he was Greenlaw!" Mr. Montague protested.

Detective Marlin shrugged his shoulders.

"It scarcely seems probable," he remarked. "In any case, if you have any claim against Mr. Laxworthy, I can assure you that he is a gentleman of large means and he is to be found at any time. A matter of civil action only," he added, turning toward the inspector and policeman.

He stepped into the car, which promptly drove off. Mr. Laxworthy sat in his corner smiling grimly to himself.

"What I should like to know is," Mr. Marlin said slowly, "where I come in? Are we allies?"

Mr. Laxworthy shook his head.

"Not this time," he replied. "I am thoroughly grateful to Mr. Greenlaw for this morning's amusement. If I can arrange it he is going to get his money safely."

The detective sighed.

"Then you better let me out at the Embankment," he said.

Mr. Laxworthy lunched at his usual table and with his charming companion of a week ago.

"Your friend," he remarked as he produced the notes—"your brother"—one might venture to take note of a certain similarity of features—has done well to get his money. Thoroughly satisfied, these fellows."

She looked at him admiringly.

"I shall not ask you any question," she murmured. "You are a wonderful man, Mr. Laxworthy."

"The forty thousand pounds," Mr. Laxworthy continued, "is there on the table; but tell me how you are going to pass it on to Greenlaw's heirs? The notes can be traced, remember."

"I will tell you," she declared. "It was to have been a secret, but now you it does not matter. I have said. There is no one, not even a detective who understands diamonds and jewels. Daniel carries the jewels with him, and when he has an opportunity he sells them. As for the notes, they trace back to me. Very well. If through any means can discover Daniel Greenlaw, I am welcome."

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